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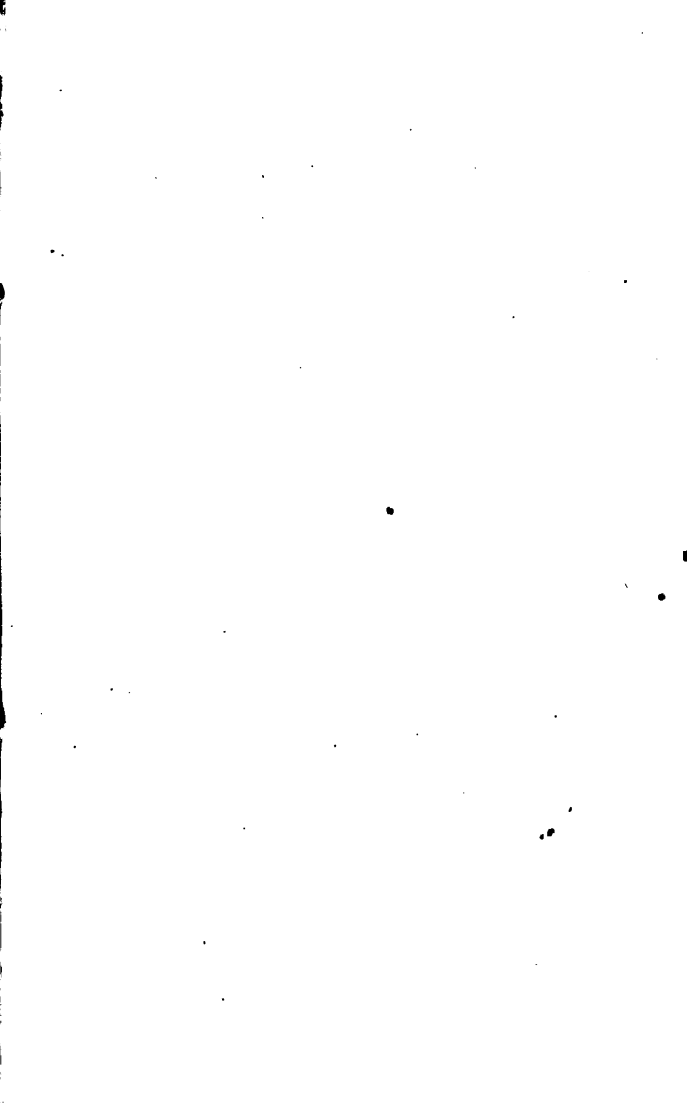
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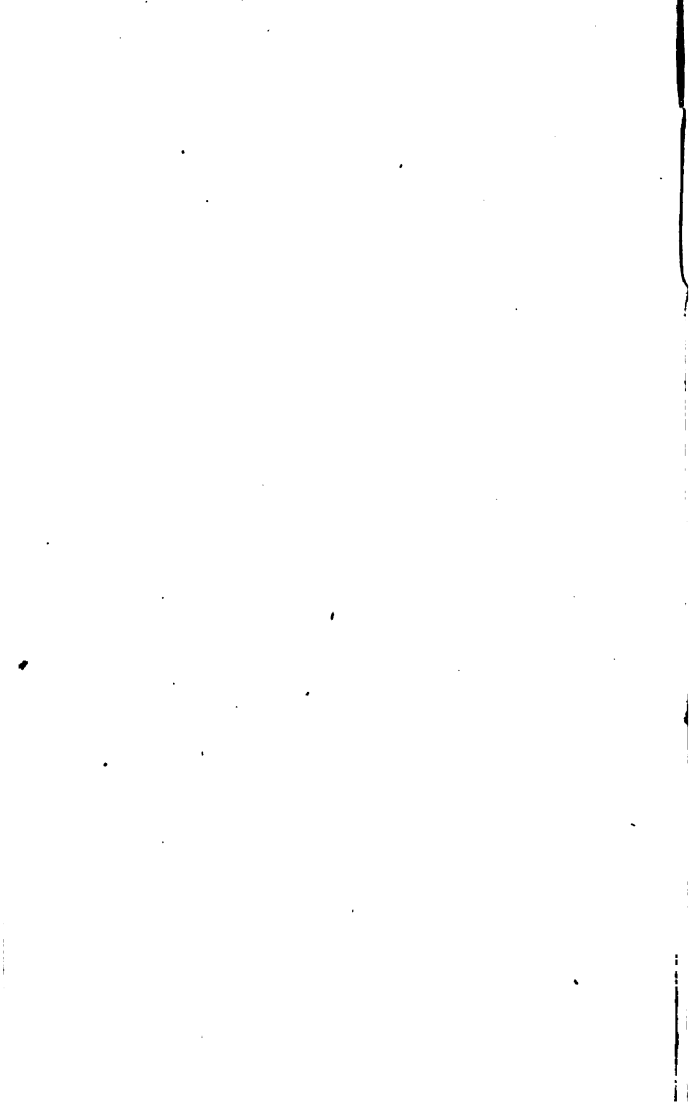
PRAYER MEETING.

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THE

Prayer-Meeting Assistant,

BY

REV. SAMUEL BACKUS,

"

OF BROOKLYN, N. Y.

"For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them."—*Matt.* 18 : 20.

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THE PRAYER-MEETING.

CHAPTER I.

Its Value.

To all who love to meet and together say, "*Our Father who art in Heaven,*" one who has lived and labored longer than most of you, comes with words of friendly salutation. He desires earnestly and affectionately to address you on the subject of Prayer-Meetings.

Prayer is as old as religion, and yet social meetings expressly for prayer, are of comparatively recent date, unless we go back to the early days of the Christian church. Many can remember when "prayer-meetings," as the term is now understood, were unknown.

But though so recent in their origin, they have by common consent come to be esteemed essential. They have not inappropriately

been termed "the spiritual barometer of the churches." As is the prayer-meeting in any church, so do we expect to find the spiritual state of that church, nor can it be otherwise.

Religion is not a dormant, inert principle, like latent heat in physical bodies, waiting some new agency to give it development and life, but it is in its nature intrinsically active; it is a power at work; it is the love of God carried out in its appropriate results. Religion being a great common interest, it will follow that, as this interest is prized, the different parties concerned will come together and seek its advancement; and inasmuch as the interests of religion are inseparably blended with prayer, Christians can hardly do otherwise than meet and pray.

Well may we believe, therefore, that where the prayer-meeting is fully attended by the brethren and sisters, and solemn in its aspects, there will everything pertaining to religion flourish, and that these meetings can be cold, and neglected and formal, only when the spirit and fire and activity of religion have departed. A glance at the dead, cold prayer-meeting, tells us unmistakably that there is the form of godliness without the power, that the things of the world are uppermost, that the flesh rules rather than the spirit. There we expect to

hear dull and pointless preaching addressed to cold and lifeless hearers. In such a case, to hear of an awakened or converted sinner, sounds like thunder from a clear sky.

We in this day should about as soon think of dispensing with the ministry itself, as of withholding from it the aid derived from the prayer-meeting.

Blessed place! Blessed employment! how readily does every warm-hearted Christian say,

"I have been there, and still would go,
'Tis like a little heaven below."

This unassuming means of grace, from the small beginnings of fifty years ago, has won its way to favor unrivalled.

We have here the prime motive power, which, impelled by the Spirit of God, drives all the divine machinery of the Gospel.

And yet the real value of this agency has hardly begun to be appreciated. In its workings hitherto, such an advancement on the past has been realized, that we have hardly thought of future improvements. We have said, "It is good, very good," and have thought of nothing better.

We have taken the prayer-meeting as we would some newly discovered plant or fruit in its native wildness, good and wholesome as we have it now, and which we therefore think not

of improving by culture. Or we have taken it like some useful and newly invented machine in its first clumsy construction. We exult in its utility, without the least imaginings of what ingenious heads, and skilful hands are yet to make it.

When first we could travel ten miles an hour by steamboat or rail car, we supposed the limits of locomotion attained, and we had no wish to travel faster; now we move fifty miles an hour, and complain of tardiness. Such do we believe will be the case in the progressive power of prayer in its future developments, especially of prayer in the social meeting, to that end purposely convened. What know we yet of the achievements which can be made by those who are "all of one accord in one place," as were the disciples at the day of Pentecost?

That memorable event was prefaced with a long prayer-meeting, wonderful in itself, wonderful in its results. We think of three thousand souls added to the Lord in one day, and we say, "Was there ever the like before, and shall there ever be the like again?" But greater things than these are before us. The time cometh when in one day, not three thousand souls shall be added to the Lord, but a whole nation. No means essentially new will be em-

ployed, but these wonders of grace are to be brought about by a better use of those already prescribed and used; and in no department of Christian effort, have we reason to look for greater improvement, than in using the power of prayer, as an agency for carrying forward the work of God. In no other department do we so fully perceive the pertinency of the divine precept, "Put on thy strength oh Zion, put on thy beautiful garments, oh Jerusalem!"

Oh this putting on of Zion's strength! It is the strength of God, though wielded by man. Is it not a consummation most devoutly to be wished? If my readers do not follow me with patience and delight through the subsequent pages, it will not be for want of a worthy theme.

There are many reasons why this tract may fail of great success, but no new and untested theories are here divulged; none are called upon to experiment in unexplored fields of research.

The views advanced are believed to be scriptural, and sustained also by successful experiment. They have been formed from a long course of careful study and observation on the nature and uses of social prayer. They are believed to be simple and practical.

The writer has mingled familiarly in prayer-

meetings for almost forty years, he has seen them in all their different phases, and attentively marked their influences; and strange would it be, if with all these advantages, he should be able to point out no common defects, or to suggest no needed improvements. Having lived and labored in a day of wonderful revivals, having seen Missions, and Tract Societies, and Sabbath Schools, progressing from their incipency to their present state, he may at least claim some credit as a witness of facts.

It may be proper here that I forewarn my readers of my purpose to pass by all prayer, but that of the social meeting.

You will not expect, therefore, anything on that all-important subject, "Closet Devotion." I leave every man undisturbed in his sacred retirement whither he has gone, "to shut his doors about him, that he may pray to his Father who is in secret." I do this with the less regret because, except in the article of mere *neglect*, there is less danger of wrong performance of secret prayer than of any other.

Neither do I intrude upon the family, as they are gathered around their fireside altar, to confess their common sins, to give thanks for their common mercies, and to ask a supply for their common wants.

Undisturbed by me, they may sing their

family hymn, read their family Bible, and offer their night and morning prayer, in their own way.

And least of all would I abridge the liberties of the pastor, as he leads the devotions of his flock. He may preach his own sermon, and offer his own prayers, so that he do it to edification, and I will find no fault with him.

Respecting these omitted occasions of prayer, there are specific human helps, and better helps might undoubtedly be provided, and to these we leave all those who may need them. Our business is with the all-important, the beloved social prayer.

CHAPTER II.

Dignity of the Subject.

THE subject thus announced, is worthy of the highest powers of rhetoric and of argument. The largest talent, and piety of the highest tone, might well be employed in carrying out our design. The Prayer-Meeting, humble and unpretending as it is, casts into shade all that earth calls great. Conquerors die, armies vanish, revolutions roll on like wave fol-

lowing wave, and yet the general features of the world undergo no change.

The energies of statesmanship and military prowess may disturb the world, but they never reform it. Not so the moral enginery whose motive power is in heaven; a power wielded by the Spirit of God, and gained by prayer.

He who can open a wider pathway to the Throne of Divine Grace, and draw down from thence a larger stream of influence to vivify and warm the dead, cold things of earth, has begun a process which earth, and heaven, and vast eternity shall feel. He who truly prays, has power with God, and wields an almighty arm.

Who then can estimate the power of believing, united prayer?

Strange now as it may seem, even on such a subject, and where everything has been considered settled for centuries, I feel like a pioneer, threading my way, where no one has opened a path before me. I will not say that nothing has been written expressly as a guide and instructor in the performance of social prayer, for it is no strange thing that a book should be born, and sleep, and die, and never be known beyond the precincts of its own covers, but if ever there had been written a good directory for this end, it never would have been forgot-

ten. Like Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, and Watt's sacred poetry, it would have been a book for the world. That such will be the destiny of the present treatise, I am not vain enough to suppose; but where a work is so much needed, and where others have done nothing, I shall not be blamed for doing what I can to meet the want, leaving it for abler hands to complete what I but begin.

CHAPTER III.

Some Things Common to All Prayer.

THERE are things essential and common to all forms and occasions of prayer; and unless these be understood, all rules, and directions, and enforcements of prayer in any particular aspect of it, must be of little use. We may, indeed, take it for granted, that these things are already familiar to all my readers, and this is probably to a considerable extent true; yet, in a treatise like this, these points cannot well be passed over.

The *duty* and use of prayer are common topics, and as abstract truths, there can be no need of proving them; and yet on these points,

apparently so plain, a few thoughts may not be amiss.

All know that to us, there are needed things, which if coming at all, must come as the gift of God. Again, if God is to bestow upon us these gifts, He must do it either as asked or unasked; *i.e.*, we must pray for them, or receive them without prayer. Some of these blessings God may indeed give, and does give, whether we pray for them or not. For it is written, "He maketh His sun to shine on the evil and on the good, and sendeth his rain on the just and on the unjust." This we see and know, in attestation of the goodness of God. The saint, that walks with God from day to day, and the most thankless wretch that sees the light, are in this alike. The morning sunshine falls as benignly upon the one as upon the other. Their fields lie side by side, and with equal tillage, grow with equal luxuriance.

When the earth has been for weeks parched under a summer sun, and vegetation looks drooping and sickly, the timely and looked-for shower refreshes the fields and purifies the air for the wicked man, as much as for the good.

But even in things the most fixed by the uniform laws of Providence, the withholding of filial trust, and grateful praise, as all the prayerless do, cannot but be displeasing to the

great Dispenser of good. Nor of the most common blessings of life, do we know how many are gained in answer to prayer. The laws of Providence in nature, have a guiding hand, and that hand is moved by prayer; and who is competent to say, that were it not for the praying ones on the earth, the wheels of nature would stop in their course and instant destruction ensue?

Ten praying men could have averted from Sodom the fiery shower, and for one prophet, the laws of gravitation were counteracted, and the waters of Jordon were parted. What then may not God do, for the sake of ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands, who cry day and night before him?

The same event happening to all alike, by no means secures to all an equal good.

The same wind which bears one vessel rapidly and safely to its destined haven, may dash another upon hidden rocks. The balmy breath of evening may invigorate and refresh one constitution, and at the same time germinate the seeds of death in another.

But in reference to the inner man, the diverse influences of the same apparent cause are the most striking. To the pious soul, the sunshine, and the flowers, and the ten thousand charms of nature, are but so many conductors

between heaven and earth, bearing upward holy aspirations to the throne of God, and downward from that throne those movings of the Spirit which cause God's children to rejoice, with joy unspeakable and full of glory. How sublimely and how blessedly does the spiritual, praying man say, as he looks upward in the starry night, "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament sheweth his handy work, day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge!" The garden, the orchard, the green fields, the extended landscape, the river, the ocean, are so many treasures of delight to the devout; and the rich and the poor share the inheritance alike.

And yet, to the ungodly and the prayerless, these things are valueless. An unholy and unconfiding frame of mind, may strip nature of all her loveliness. It may turn the very sunshine into darkness, and make the flowers sickening. The sweet, soft music of the birds and the bees, may scathe the soul, and good itself may become hateful; and to see God in these things may be the climax of horror. Such, we apprehend, are some of the elements of the worm and the fire, as they begin to gnaw and to burn, on this side the grave.

But the minds even of the wicked are not always in this state. Though they neither love

nor fear God, they may for a season rejoice in his works. He who has spread out so many beauties before them, has also given them taste to perceive and relish these beauties ; nor is this taste necessarily destroyed by sin. The prayerless and the praiseless may have tastes highly refined, and intellects highly cultivated, and by them the beauties of nature may be fully perceived and delighted in. But then these things lure the heart away from God, and to the graceless become so many links in a chain by which Satan binds his victims.

This chain may seem to be made of gold, and wreathed with flowers ; it may appear at first weak, and its action may be all but imperceptible ; but it is continually thickening and hardening in its progress, becoming at length a chain of heated iron, burning and scathing the ungodly sufferer, soon to be riveted by devils to some fixture in their dark abode. Such may be the ultimate difference between praying and being prayerless.

These are indeed dreadful thoughts, but dreadful only because they are true.

Thus, then, is it shown, that in things which seem the most uniform and fixed, there is a use, and a beauty in prayer.

THINGS COMMON TO PRAYER, CONTINUED.
Spiritual Blessings.

WE have been considering prayer in reference to the procurement and value of earthly things. But its greatest value is still unperceived. There is another and higher department of the divine administration, where prayer is everything. In the department of spiritualities it is especially true, that he who asketh receiveth, and only he. Here all may be summed up in a word, "The gift of the Spirit." The Spirit, indeed, is no substitute for the moral actings of the human soul, but it is that which guides and models those actings, in all which is befitting our high relations to God. This Spirit, with all its blessed fruits, in the plain language of the Bible, "God giveth to them that ask him." This explicit language is enough. Here our faith should rest, without waiting for more specific reasons to fix our trust.

Here it is, that in the divine plan, God giveth not account of any of his matters before he bids us believe and obey.

This Holy Spirit God is ready, exceedingly ready, to give to those that ask him; but nowhere that I know of, has he told us that he bestows it otherwise.

Indeed, in speaking of the new heart as the promised gift of the Spirit, he says, "For this will I be enquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them."

In saying all this, I am not forgetful that the Spirit is often given, not only to those who ask not his visitations, but even to those who stoutly fight against him; though I have yet to learn that this heavenly benefaction may not, in all instances, be bestowed in answer to the prayers of some one or more of God's believing children.

Nor can we tell where these strivings would stop, were it not for the stuntedness, and fickleness, and other unholy mixtures, which are found in the prayers of the saints.

There are, in every Christian community, a few who are reputed eminent for prayer and piety; and, to those observant of such things, it has always seemed that if these few eminently pious Christians, should stop praying, religion would die out.

And if this be so, it is as plain on the other hand, that if all Christians would watch and pray, as these few do watch and pray, the world would soon be converted to Christ.

THINGS COMMON TO PRAYER, CONTINUED.

The Purposes of God.

WE can hardly think of praying to God in any form, without at the same time thinking of Him as planning, and counselling, and purposing, the things he is to do. We are, of necessity, brought to consider prayer as connected with the eternal and unchangeable purposes of God.

We are in a measure driven to this course, not merely by the sneers and cavils of the infidel, for his sneers and cavils, and even his arguments, are comparatively harmless things as used against the duty and prevalence of prayer; but we often find the honest and simple-minded stumbled and perplexed with the suggestion, that because God is unchangeable, therefore prayer must be unavailing. These misgivings are always painful, and may be highly dangerous.

Such minds should therefore, as far as possible, be relieved and rightly guided.

Now it is evidently useless for us, if we were so disposed, to deny that God has formed a decree or eternal purpose, according to which he gives his Spirit, and also performs all his other works. God "discerneth the end from the beginning, and from ancient time the thing

that is not yet done, saying "my counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure."

This is matter of rejoicing, for God alone is competent to judge rightly what he shall do.

We ought not to indulge even the most secret wish, that he should in anything act otherwise than according to his own determinate counsel and foreknowledge; nor should we have any dread of looking such a doctrine fully in the face, whatever may be the point of duty, or privilege, which we may wish to investigate.

Secret things we know belong unto the Lord, and to whom else should they belong? And with the Lord, as secret things, we ought most cheerfully to leave them. But then all things pertaining to God and his works are not secret; many glorious truths of this sort are revealed, and these belong to us and our children forever. To take the things that are revealed, and to leave in their own original secrecy things not revealed, is infinitely better than making efforts to bend our views into a supposed consistency with human theories and formularies, absurdly enough called STANDARDS. We have no standard of Christian doctrine but God's own word, legitimately and properly interpreted. From what God has done, and from what he has caused to be written, there

are many things which we can know, and which we ought to know.

We know that he has given, and therefore from the beginning has purposed to give, every department of this universe over which he reigns, its own appropriate laws, according to its own intrinsic nature. We know that God has made the heavenly bodies, and that they are most wonderfully governed; but yet not by the laws of animal life, or by moral precepts sanctioned by pains and penalties. Animals, as animals, are governed not by the laws of vegetation, but by the proper laws of animal life, just referred to. To man, and other beings endowed with a moral nature, God has given a moral law, adapted to this moral nature, and by this law he will govern them.

God's laws are permanent in their character, so that having once enacted them he never repeals them; and according to them all his plans and purposes will be carried out. In conformity with its own appropriate laws, each department of his government will be administered.

It follows that in dealing with moral beings, God will ever act in conformity with that decree, which secures to them full and perpetual possession of all the powers and prerogatives of moral agency, in subordination to moral

law. We may rest assured, that God as a moral ruler will never act upon our race otherwise than as upon beings endowed with the capacity of choosing and acting for themselves.

The purposes of God are so far from interfering with the freedom of intelligent intercourse between him and his creatures, that they include in their very nature the confirmation of freedom in moral acts. As a consequence, they must also include all the appropriate contingencies of efforts and results, belonging to those acts.

By this process, we come to the great point at issue, viz: that among such contingencies, PRAYER holds a pre-eminent distinction. God, then, having firmly decreed that some of his creatures shall be and remain forever endowed with the power of asking, and the promise of receiving, it must be with an ill grace that we bring up the purposes of God, as an objection to the utility of prayer.

CHAPTER IV.

Manner of Approaching God in Prayer.

It being once decided on general principles,

that prayer is suited to our condition, as the rational creatures of God, and that by this and other acts of worship we ought to approach him, the manner of this approach becomes a theme of immense magnitude. We have, as fixed principles, that everything is depending on the blessing of God, and that this blessing is to be obtained by prayer; and in view of these principles, we instinctively feel that a more momentous theme can scarcely be presented to our minds, than the manner of our approach. Everything is depending on the blessing of God, that blessing is to be obtained by prayer, and with all solicitude we ask, "How shall we pray, so that our prayers shall be favorably answered? How shall the largest, richest blessing, be obtained? How shall we best please God, in drawing near to him?"

To answer these enquiries, and gain these ends, is the design of the present essay, in so far as seasons of special social prayer are concerned.

As in every other undertaking, so in this, a first requisite is to fix definitely in the mind the object aimed at.

We never ought to appoint or to attend a prayer-meeting, without having before us some desired and expected result, which can be conceived of in thought, and expressed in words.

Otherwise, any good that may be gained can be nothing more than what is called a "lucky accident;" a thing of rare occurrence, and never to be trusted. The more general and undefined idea of worshipping God, or gaining some nameless good, to our bodies or souls, is not enough. This is to act without an object. That a meeting for worship may be profitable, we must understand *what* worship we mean to pay, and *what* blessing we expect to receive. Mere reasoning about what may be right and proper to say to God is not enough. We should come, not with the product of pert reasonings, but with the deep feelings of a burdened soul; with the pouring out of the heart, rather than the dry cogitations of the head.

The work of preparation is evidently of great account, and in this, it will be profitable to give a very large place to those thoughts which seem spontaneously to press and fasten on the mind.

A recurrence to our own experience will inform us, that there are from time to time, themes that hover around us, and court our attention, which quicken into action our memories, which excite our hopes and our fears. These are things which the more tenaciously cling to us, the more we strive to expel them.

These are for the time being, the actings and speakings of the heart. They are, while they last, the wants and desires and offerings of the soul. They are in fact *the heart*, which we should pour out before God. These we should by all means take with us to the social meeting. Vastly better are they than the dry and dusty creations of mere thinking, forced into life, or rather into motion, as the means of making a speech, or gathering expressions for a prayer. Let spontaniety of feeling flow in its own self-sought channel, and we shall not go empty to God.

Before we go to the prayer-meeting we shall know *why* we are going, while we are there, we shall know *why* we have come, and in the review, we can tell *where* we have been.

Nor let it be once imagined that this using the thoughts we have, rather than trying to engender those we have not, is to neglect keeping the heart with dilligence.

Instead of neglecting the heart, this is the very means of training it to speak out fully and freely, in its own native dialect.

Those feelings which lie uppermost in our minds when we think of appearing before God are likely to be the best, as the burden of our first approach to him in prayer; and the thoughts which arise in view of meeting our

brethren, are likely to be the very things which we ought to talk about with them, for mutual edification. Do we go to the prayer-meeting pressed with a sense of guilt, and delinquency in duty, then should that feeling be wrought into humble confession, with penitential supplication for forgiveness. Then should we offer the sacrifice of a broken heart. But if a sense of the goodness of God in special mercies received fill the mind, then should we be prepared to approach the Throne with songs and thanksgivings. Do darkness and gloom and despondency afflict us? then surely we should pray, "Lord lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us." "Is any among you afflicted? let him pray;" is the simple and expressive Bible direction. And again are we told, "Confess your faults one to another, and pray for one another, that ye may be healed."

Thus, in all states and circumstances of life, the thing which for the time the mind feels, is the proper theme for its devotions, whether that feeling be personal or social.

And if, as will sometimes be the case, the mind be barren and desolate, seemingly bereft of all thought, and all feeling, and all desire, then let so much of the man as is left to sigh and groan and lament over this dreadful bar-

renness do so, by saying, "Quicken me, oh Lord, according to thy word."

CHAPTER V.

Individual Preparation.

MY readers will have observed that, though speaking of preparation for a social meeting, I have treated of those who are to join in it as of so many individuals; and so, indeed, they are. Each one for himself is to prepare his own mind for the offering of prayer, according to his condition; just as if he was going into his closet, to pray alone with God. The reason for this is found in the fact, that individuality, and personality, and peculiarity of wants and interests, is the very thing by which to take advantage of all the powers and perquisites of our social nature; uniting all hearts into one, and producing agreement in all that shall be asked of God, or offered to him. This very individuality of desire is the basis of social feeling and social action.

Our idea may be illustrated, if not proved, by the following considerations. Wherever

there is a mere joint stock interest, that of itself calls forth no feeling of sympathy among the proprietors. Their interests being identical, become thereby purely personal, and are much more frequently the occasion of strife than of friendship. Hence a community of goods, or anything approaching to it, is destructive of the peace of society. Not so the mingling of kind offices, where the interests of each are distinct.

It is wonderful to see how God adapts his method of influencing the human mind to the laws and principles of that mind; and in nothing is this adaptation more striking than in the use he makes of our social nature, which will be the theme of our next chapter.

CHAPTER VI.

Our Social Nature.

It thus comes to pass, that no sooner has the Christian left his closet door, where he has been praying to God as his Father, in language and thought so purely his own, that he has not had even the outlines prescribed by his Master, than he is met with a directory for social prayer, a directory adapted to the very small-

est number that can use the plural pronoun, and say, "Our Father who art in heaven." As the prayer in secret to Him who seeth in secret, secures an open reward, so the agreement in heart of two on earth, secures a social blessing from above. "It shall be done for them by their *Father who is in heaven.*" The moment the inspirations of secrecy and solitude leave us, the sympathies of our social being, come to our aid.

But while this is so, we lose not our individuality, but only leave in our closets those things which are unsuited to any ear, and any heart, but those of God. We leave nothing behind us because it is personal merely. Just what we are when alone, do we go to meet our brethren in the chosen place. The aggregate of our individual wants, and feelings, so far as these are proper to be known by others, makes up the common stock of material for the prayer-meeting; and by the common laws of brotherhood, each one shares his equal portion of the whole:

"Our joys, our fears, our hopes are one,
Our comforts and our cares."

"We bear one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ."

Now let us see how the social principle works when each apart, according to the op-

portunity afforded, has communed with his own heart and with God, and all with one accord have come together into one place. There are present, persons of all ages, all characters, and all conditions of life, each seeking some good, adapted to his own peculiar wants.

We have a right to suppose there may be in the assembly some new-made, heart-stricken widow, left with little children, in deep poverty. She is known, and beloved, and pitied by the whole assembly. It is known, too, that she prizes the sympathies, and desires the prayers, of her Christian friends, and that she is making great account of a remembrance, in the exercises of the meeting. The pressure of her griefs is so great that she knows not how to bear it alone. There is not another case like her's; and yet there is not one in which there is more unity of heart.

The services having been suitably introduced, some brother brings her case before God, and before the assembly, in language simple, appropriate, affecting. Her sorrows are felt and uttered, her wants and those of her babes are feelingly and earnestly spread out before the widow's God, and the orphan's Father. If the breathless silence is interrupted, it is only by the struggling bosom, unable to do more than half conceal its emotions.

Tell me now, can you conceive of unity more complete, of concentration of feeling more entire? This one widow's grief has become, for the time, the grief of all, as when one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; and as sure as there is prevalence in prayer, the blessing of the widow's God is gained.

There may be a case of a very different description. A brother may have received signal blessings, and feel that to praise God alone, is not enough. He wishes to call upon his brethren and sisters, saying, "Magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt His name together." His call for praise is cheerfully responded to, and united thanksgiving is rendered in his behalf. Do you not hear an hundred hearts in perfect unison, beating with new pulsations of delight? If the joy be the joy of one, the praise is the praise of all. It is the very genius of the gospel, that it makes the feelings of one soul the common property of many souls. It is in this way that heart is drawn to heart, and all hearts are welded as it were into one, by the common attraction of a Christian love.

There may be other cases, differing from either of the preceding. There may be one who has had great enlargement in the things of God, and he desires to see the blessing ex-

tended ; or there may be another who is laboring under great spiritual darkness, and feels that God has shut up his tender mercies from him. Such cases specified, touch every soul ; they draw out all hearts in united prayer.

There may be a brother who has grievously sinned, and who wishes as a privilege the opportunity of making confession and asking forgiveness. Again the social feelings are in full play, and all will hasten to "restore such an one in the spirit of meekness," feeling that nothing but the grace of God has kept them from the same condemnation.

There may be, there have been, prayer-meetings in which were present those who were by the Spirit smitten down with a sense of sin, and who were crying out in bitterness of soul, "What shall we do to be saved?" while others were saying, "Rejoice with us, for we have found the precious Saviour."

Do you want anything of more general interest? can you think of anything in which there will be more entire agreement? Souls flow and unite together, as drops of water meet and mingle at the bottom of the vessel.

I have specified a few out of a great multitude of supposable cases, to show the workings of our social nature, in making individual wants and interests the very basis of unity in divine wor-

ship. While *specific* causes for prayer and praise unite all hearts, mere *generalisms* leave them like particles of matter floating loosely about, having no affinities, drawing them to a common center. Individualism, properly employed, draws all minds to itself, as the magnet attracts chalybeate dust.

Inasmuch as God has made us social beings, and has himself made so much use of our social nature in the economy of his kingdom, I have felt impelled to give these illustrations of sympathy, as it may be made to act in behalf of the honored prayer-meeting.

If, now, to this consentaneousness of feeling in regard to special personal concerns, there be added the common topics and themes of interest, which, some or all of them, are almost sure to be called up, we cannot fail of seeing how a meeting for prayer may be specifically adapted to every case, while without one jarring note all voices may unite in joining chorus, and saying, "How good and how pleasant a thing it is for brethren to dwell together in unity."

Thus may we understand what it is for all things to be done "decently and in order." Thus may we know how much better is definiteness and simplicity than vague and confused notions; how much better it is, to know

what we have said, what we are saying, and what we mean to say, than to know that we have said something, or wished to say something. We shall feel it better to say, "We have confessed such and such sins to God, we have given him thanks for such and such blessings, and we have earnestly prayed to him to do this and that," than to say, "We have paid our respects to God, and in a general and civil way have endeavored to propitiate his favor." It is better, and if we do as we ought we shall find it better, at the close of a meeting, to say, "We have had our souls drawn out in the prayers and praises of the brethren," than to say merely, "We have heard such and such brethren pray." Are we aware, dear brethren, how much account God makes of this unity of thought and aim? Do we think how earnestly Christ enjoined this on his disciples, and what large promises he has made to those who act it out? Especially do we realize how pathetically he prayed to his Father for its bestowment, as he was performing his last official services, while the agonies of the garden and of the cross were full before him? Hear his tender accents, "That they all may be one, as thou Father art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us; that the world may believe that thou hast sent

me." God has given in the wonders of his works a social nature to man, he himself makes great account of it, and wo to us if we neglect it.

CHAPTER VII.

God to be Approached with Reverence.

HAVING made up our inventory of wants and wishes, having determined why we desire to come before God in social worship, having our hearts knit together in brotherly love, our next business is to know Him before Whom we come, and what we are to expect at his hands. I do not speak of the solemn awe which we ought to feel in approaching God, because of his majesty, and our sinfulness, such as made the prophet cry, "Wo is me, for I am undone, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts." I speak now of what we are to think of God in relation to prayer, what he thinks of it, what we may expect of him. In this particular we have an inspired directory for our faith, furnished ready to our hands. "He that

cometh unto God, must believe that He is, and that He is the rewarder of those that diligently seek him." It would seem as though a truth so manifest as this, must have been known had the divine word been silent on the subject, and yet we have reason to fear that, though now plainly revealed, it is often forgotten. Do we always pray as to a living and present God? Do we always feel that he hears us, and remembers what we say to him? Do we always know and remember ourselves, what we say to him? When we have laid our requests before him, do we always wait and expect a reply? Nay, if God were to write such a reply in heaven, and send it down by an angel to be read in our hearing, should we not, in expectancy of its meaning, stand in doubt of its purport, and looking one at another, ask? "What can this response be about? for we expected nothing."

Would it not puzzle us to think what prayers we had offered, or for what we had given thanks? Now, brethren, these things ought not so to be.

CHAPTER VIII.

A Present God.

We ought always to pray as to a present God, he that cometh unto God, "MUST BELIEVE THAT HE IS." If this direction be proper for any besides, it is proper for us. We must have that faith in our prayers, which makes the being of God a reality to our minds. We must not only assent to his being, as a truth proved by evidence addressed to the intellect, but it must be a truth *felt*. This is possible. If there were no wickedness in the thing, there never was a more senseless dogma than one which we often hear, viz: that we cannot know there is a God, or feel his presence, because we know him not by our corporeal senses; because we have never seen him and handled him. This is to contradict in the article of God, the sufficiency of evidence which we freely and constantly admit in other things.

Sound philosophy will teach us that *being*, whether human or divine, whether created or uncreated, is known only by its attributes. Of the real *essence* of being, whether celestial or terrestrial, we know nothing. The shallow thinker may say, that he apprehends the essence of his fellow-man by the corporeal

senses ; but nothing can be more false. The body which is felt, is not the man ; the voice which is heard is not the man, and the same may be said of anything about him, palpable to us.

It is the idea of the spiritual, the immaterial part, which makes us feel that a fellow-being is with us—not that we can, even in this way, determine what man's essence is. We can only say, we perceive such and such attributes or qualities, indicating to us the existence and presence of a being like ourselves. I have an instance fresh in my memory, fully to my purpose. I once saw the body of a man of God, moving, walking, speaking even, and yet I saw not that man. I had been wont to know him as possessed of a strong mind, with a warm and holy heart, but now there was only the human form, whose unchanged appearance rendered the ruin more dreadful. He was not a maniac, he was not an idiot ; but the soul had fled, and left the body alive. I am not agitating any curious questions about the union of the material and the immaterial in man ; I am only speaking of this man as he appeared to me—a mere moving body, and nothing more. And never do I recollect feeling so vividly what it must be to dwell in blank emptiness, as when closeted with what

seemed so like my venerated friend. Every child knows that there is no loneliness more complete, than that of the sepulchre, with its lifeless inmates. It cannot be that we become conscious of a present, human being, by apprehending the material body through the medium of the corporeal senses. The body, as an outer garment, serves to introduce the soul to our notice; but the man, the living, thinking, feeling man, we know, as far as we know him at all, by his own appropriate, spiritual attributes. And now, if we know man by his attributes, as far as we know him at all, surely we may know God, who is wholly a spirit, by means of His attributes, which are written all around us, and within us, and of which our own conscious existence is proof demonstrative.

I had thought of more fully showing how we are continually made to realize the existence and presence of being, by some one attribute of such being, and oftentimes by an attribute seemingly least significant, as a whisper, a rustling noise, a shadow, and the like; but the single and remarkable instance I have adduced, it does seem to me, must entirely settle the question of possibility, showing us by natural things, that God lays down no hard conditions, when he requires us to come to Him believing that "*He is.*" There is no impossibility in a

faith which is the *evidence* of things not seen, as well as the *substance* of things hoped for.

CHAPTER IX.

God Will Hear Prayer and Answer it.

BUT believing in the being of God is not enough, unless his character is also before us. By faith we must behold him as "the rewarder of them that diligently seek him." We must feel, not only that we are speaking to a present and attentive God, but also that this God will speak to us in return. We ought to feel, and by taking pains we may feel, that we are as truly in the presence of God as of each other, that we speak to him as really as we speak to each other; and that if we seek him as we ought, he will surely grant our requests.

But will God grant in answer to our prayers the very things we ask? Not always, for we may ask that which we ought not to have. We may ask for those things which would injure us. We do not suppose God is going to give up the government of the world to us, or to free us from the control of his providence and his law. But he must

do this, if he give an unconditional affirmative to every request which we may make. Yea, the very idea of faith in God, implies a belief of his wisdom to choose for us, as well as of his goodness to bless us.

We have nothing on which to ground a confidence that God will grant our particular requests, in kind, and manner, as we may present them, unless we can find some specific promise that meets the case, or have evidence from his word, that our requests are so in accordance with his great designs of love and mercy which he is carrying forward in the world, that he cannot refuse us.

We must remember, moreover, that much is implied in the phrase, "Diligently seek him." It is impossible for us diligently to seek God unless at the same time, on our part, and with our best powers, we lend a hearty co-operation in bringing about the answer to our prayer.

The man who rightly prays to God for success in any labor to be performed, stands ready, with the strength given, to perform that labor himself. He does not expect God will perform it for him. This principle holds good in reference to everything which belongs to us as duty.

In regard to specific answers to prayers, we shall, moreover, find a wide difference between

temporal and spiritual blessings. In temporal blessings, there are no specific promises given, and, therefore, no specific answers are certain; while, as regards spiritual good, the promises seem all but unconditional. When Christ in the garden prayed for the avoidance of bodily suffering, he added, after the greatest importunity, "Father, not as I will, but as Thou wilt." In praying for spiritual gifts, he makes no such condition or contingency. He says, without any proviso, "Father, keep through thine own name, those whom thou hast given me." "Father, I will that those whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am." "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." And again appealing to the fullness of paternal love in giving to children, he says, "How *much more* shall your Heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him." We think there is also a preference given to those things which are covered directly by the atonement. By this we mean things to which the atonement had immediate reference.

There is, indeed, a sense in which all good of every kind bestowed on man is through a Mediator. But in regard to all common temporal blessings, this relation to the atonement is incidental only. It comes by the atonement, only as the probationary state of this world comes in

this way. We do not suppose that Christ died that men might have rain and sunshine, or civil privileges here for a season. In God's remedial system these things are means, not the end itself.

But the forgiveness of sin, the sanctification of the heart by the Spirit, and eternal life in heaven, are direct results of the atonement. In reference to these it was made, and only in view of it could God consistently grant them.

When, therefore, Christ says to his disciples, "Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in *my name*, I will do it," he must have had things of this sort in view. "In my name," must have reference to what Christ has done, and must, of course, be inapplicable to everything not depending on the atonement by him effected.

In those things which thus are covered by the sacrifice of Christ, and which fall under the operation of the Spirit, we seem to have unlimited license to enlarge and multiply, and urge, and repeat, our requests, as we please.

Here again, however, we do not know certainly that even spiritual blessings will light down just where we wish, and in the very manner we would prescribe, even on the supposition that our own frame of mind is pleasing to God.

Some of God's promises and plans are shaped expressly to the union of many hearts, and many hands, in gaining a desired end. In all such cases, the answer must not be expected unless the union is complete, and the desire ardent, and the number, and the perseverance such, that God's appointment will be honored in a favorable response.

What God has promised to secret, or individual prayer, he will sacredly fulfil, according as that prayer is more or less such as it should be; and there the promise rests. So, too, what God has promised to public united prayer he will grant in the same way. A case may arise in which the divine economy demands that the circle of prayer be enlarged, and that more hearts be combined, or that longer trial of faith should be made, or a more public testimony be given for God. All these things tend to produce a degree of uncertainty in regard to a specific answer to prayer, even in spiritual things.

Not knowing fully what is done, or what is required to be done, we cannot know beyond doubt, whether a particular blessing will be granted at all, or if granted, at what time, and under what circumstances.

It may be, also, that if prayer be offered for an individual, that individual may have so

they are more or less useful according as they are well or ill conducted. There is no magic charm in the mere name of *prayer-meeting*.

If any are pleased to make light of our views, by calling them the advocacy of religious machinery, we are not careful to deny the charge, as a fact, though we repel the insinuation of wrong, as unfounded.

Religious meetings have often, no doubt, been injudiciously managed, by what has been familiarly called machinery; and so too, they have been badly managed by other means—so that such a fact decides nothing.

Whatever is to be done in things material or spiritual, machinery of some sort, is necessary to the doing of it. God always employs it in carrying on his works. What wonderful principles are employed in the motions of the heavens, and how nicely are they adjusted in their application. Consider the agencies concerned in the rearing of a plant, or the formation of an insect. And why should there not be machinery employed in moving and shaping the human mind? The human soul does not undergo transformations by a mere divine fiat, like that which said "Let there be Light, and there was Light." Machinery of various kinds is to be employed. To mention a single instance, in preparing souls for heaven, the gos-

pel is to be preached, nor is it a matter of indifference *how* it shall be preached. God always gives the increase, but he does not give it equally to every kind of tillage.

If ministers will preach the Bible without perversion, in ever so homely or unskilful a manner, it will be likely to save some; but when preached by Paul or Whitfield, it saves thousands. So a company of pious men, having the spirit of prayer at all, can hardly manage a meeting so poorly, that no blessing shall be obtained; but when have we seen, and when shall we see, a prayer-meeting so rich and so blessed in its results, as was that held in an upper room, by the disciples of our Lord, during the interval between his ascension and the day of Pentecost?

We do, and we must, insist upon it, that some methods of procedure are more pleasing to God than others, and that an orderly and comely meeting will, other things being equal, answer its end better than an uncomely and disorderly one. We believe that some means are more likely to induce the spirit of prayer than others, and, of consequence, more likely to obtain a favorable response. We believe that here, as everywhere else, an effort made for the attainment of some tangible and intelligible object, is more likely to result favorably than

mere beating of the air. We make no reliance on what may be called machinery, except as means to an end. We no more expect to have our praying done in this way, than to have the fabrics for our clothing, or implements for our household so produced; and we would as soon dispense with machinery, in the one case as in the other. I have no great fear nor favor for the term *machinery*. We are entirely willing, in its stead, to substitute "*means of grace*," if any like the term better. But "*ordinary means of grace*," we decidedly object to, until it can be shown that preaching and praying have *ordinarily* been performed in the most effectual and successful manner.

We confess that the term "*ordinary means of grace*," as used by some men, and perhaps we may say, some sets of men, brings too forcibly to our minds the language of the poet—

"To wear out life
In dropping buckets into empty wells,
And growing old in drawing nothing up."

We are always afraid of being misunderstood, and therefore throw in a word of caution here, as though we might be supposed to be recommending some easy way of praying; some way of dispensing with carefulness and earnestness in holy living; some labor-saving apparatus, encouraging indolence. We do no

such thing. As the philosopher said of old, "There is no royal road to geometry," so we say in regard to things of religion, "There is no lazy way to heaven." We have not been telling, nor meaning to tell, how good prayer-meetings may be had without warm-hearted piety, but how such piety may expend itself in better-directed and more successful effort.

CHAPTER XI.

Topics for Prayer—How Introduced.

THE success and interest of a prayer-meeting will depend very much on a right, and easy, and natural introduction of the various topics suitable for prayer. We have spoken before of the importance of having the subjects for prayer simple, and pointed, and distinct, and understood.

What we are now inquiring after is, the best mode of bringing these various topics of prayer before those who may be assembled.

We are interested to know, how the different topics and themes and subjects of prayer, shall be cognizable by the brethren; so that each matter of general, or individual interest, shall fill

its proper place, and receive its due degree of attention.

A few hints are all that will be necessary, as a well-understood view of the thing to be done will generally suggest the best way of doing that thing, in the existing circumstances.

It is very likely that every brother going to the meeting, with some one burthen pressing his soul, may have the opportunity of himself leading in prayer, and so of bringing his own burthen before God.

He can do the very thing he wishes to have done, and he can do it in his own way; and he above all others is the man to do it. But no brother should depend on the opportunity of praying himself. Free conversation should occupy a portion of the time, and the thoughts which each one may have carried with him as the burthen of his soul are the things about which he should speak in those intervals allowed for conversation. In this way a general interest may be created on the various points demanding attention. By such free disclosures everything pertaining to individuals becomes cognizable by all. Such interchanges of real thought are a thousand times better than stale thread-bare exhortations, and mimic preaching.

There may be, and there ought to be made, such free and full disclosures, as shall bring the

brethren acquainted with each other's state of mind, and condition of life.

Nor do we forget the sisters—often the most steadfast and valued members of the Christian community. We will not agitate the question whether females may properly pray and exhort in promiscuous meetings; but if they may not publicly speak and pray in their own behalf with their own lips, they can do the same thing through the brethren of their acquaintance. Nor is there any valid objection to their throwing on the table written notes of request for prayer, according to their own feelings, either with or without their names. Such notes always give life to a meeting: they have always been used in reference to some cases, such as sickness and affliction, and why should not the custom be so extended as to meet every want which may arise?

By means such as these all matters of a personal nature, may without difficulty be introduced.

Other matters more general and public may be propounded by the chairman, or by any brother, or by a standing committee for the purpose, or in any way which shall seem expedient, and which on trial shall prove successful.

In all this there is nothing extravagant, nothing difficult, nothing more than is practiced

every day, in meetings of far less interest than the prayer-meeting. Whenever and wherever there is to be an assemblage of men, to sing, or talk, or play, or do anything else, you find the programme, informing you of what is to be done. In an ordination or installation, specific prayers are assigned to particular individuals; which if properly performed, relate entirely to one topic, and that already known.

In all such instances it is deemed liberty enough for the performer, that he be expected to utter the pre-expressed thoughts and desires of the congregation; using for this purpose his own language, and his own arrangement.

Certainly, in a little gathering of neighbors, and brethren, and friends, there can be no difficulty in doing the same thing, and with less of formality attending the service.

Something like this is indispensable to that kind of prayer intended by Christ, when he said, "Whatsoever things ye desire when ye pray, believe that ye shall receive them, and ye shall have them." Or this, "If two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that ye shall ask, it shall be done for you of my Father which is in heaven."

We now see the meeting assembled. The parties are there—differing in rank and character, and yet in love drawing near to each

other, becoming one in heart and one in speech.

There are the suppliants, prepared in spirit with the matter of their petitions and addresses, ready to be offered. And there, too, on his throne of grace, sits the great Dispenser of good in the person of Christ, uttering those large and gracious promises, just recited from his own word. Can you look on such a spectacle and say with careless indifference, "Oh! it is only a prayer-meeting, and therefore it matters little by whom it is attended, or how it is conducted?" "Only a prayer-meeting?" and what would you have more or greater than a prayer-meeting? Say, rather, "*It is a prayer-meeting, which if taken in its largest sense, is the most solemn and interesting place this side of heaven.*" No matter how a prayer-meeting, a meeting to converse with God, is conducted! Shall every point of etiquette be regarded when we meet our vile and worthless fellow-mortals, and yet, when we come before God shall all regard to decorum be laid aside? Instead of this, our very best thoughts and feelings, our best words, should be held in requisition.

CHAPTER XII.

The Presiding Member.

IN all deliberative assemblies there is needed a head, or presiding member, through whom the other members may maintain intercourse with each other; and very much depends upon the manner in which this member discharges his functions. It is, therefore, proper that we consider for a moment the duties of this presiding member. I am constrained to believe, that rightly and skilfully to conduct the exercises of a prayer-meeting requires rare qualifications; more rare than is commonly supposed. Even ministers more often fail here, than in any other pastoral gift. They deem the thing so plain and so easy thatt hey never learn to do it well.

If we rightly judge, the great requisites are, a nice and quick perception of times and circumstances, and a skill in drawing out minds in such a way that they shall not feel conscious of any external influence.

Much is said about using freedom in social meetings, and all feel the value of it; and yet

this freedom, duly regulated, is seldom obtained. We generally find formal stiffness, or wild disorder.

The using of this freedom is urged by argument, and enforced by exhortation. Brethren are invited, and coaxed, and scolded, to bring them out, but they will not show themselves; and with a little insight into human character, we might know they would not. The human mind is not so moved. A man may be *driven* to work with his hands unwillingly, but never to engage in the work of mingling hearts. Nothing is more freezing than artificial efforts, to force men to glow with emotion, and to speak with earnestness.

The thing is hardly to be defined, and yet we apprehend the great secret lies in throwing out the right thought, at the right time, and in the right way, so that all shall at once catch hold of it, as a suggestion of their own minds, and feel an instant desire to hear and talk freely about it.

A leader capable of fully doing this we may not have always at hand, but with a correct model before us we have a double advantage. We know better whom to select, and the person selected will know better what he ought to do. We can thus approximate to correctness, if we may not reach it.

Of one thing we may be certain; nothing will so effectually draw out and cultivate all the talent for edification that may be found in a church, as the skilful conduct of its social meetings.

A question propounded for inquiry, a topic for discussion, an incident narrated, a theme for prayer proposed, may give an impulse to a meeting, which shall run through it and continue beyond it.

The leader should feel that he is sustained by the brethren, and that as their organ he has only to let his feelings act, and to give free exercise to good common sense. He should not demean himself as anything more than an equal, neither should he fear to say or do anything which he may think ought to be said or done. He should feel himself easy and at home, like a father among his children. It is plain from this sketch, that skill and tact in the conduct of a prayer-meeting is not to be attained accidentally by any one, whatever may be his natural talents. It requires the study of men, the study of the Bible, familiarity with God. The work to be done requires not official station, but it does require official qualifications.

The attendance of the pastor should never be considered essential to a good meeting, but

when he can attend, his presence will on various accounts be beneficial. Aside from his better preparedness for presiding well, he will in this way, form an acquaintance with the character and talents of his people, of great value in his intercourse with them, and one which can be no where else acquired. No general rule will, however, always apply, except this, that the meetings should be made useful and interesting, so far as this can be done.

The proper gift of God bestowed on each one should be turned to the best possible account, whatever that gift may be.

CHAPTER XIII.

Manner in Prayer.

BUT while these things are so, it is also true that the less of form and rule there is among those who have assembled for conference and prayer the better, provided there be no disorder, and no intervals of blank, chilling silence. An occasional outbreak of indiscretion, even, is no way so bad as stiff, stately, and cold formality.

In some respects, the exercises of a prayer-

meeting must be modified by the number and character of the persons present, and the length of time they can spend together. Where only a few can be collected, it is manifest that one individual must perform what had better be divided among a number. It will not be possible to give directions for all the varying circumstances and occasions which may arise. Our instructions are designed for meetings respectable in number and character, leaving smaller assemblages to be regulated as best they may be; and where one has to do the work of many, our advice to him is that he do one thing at a time, doing that as though, for the moment, it were his whole duty. If several topics must be introduced into a single prayer, they may be so arranged that each one of those topics shall be presented entire, and in such a way that all may know for what they are praying and for what they are giving thanks.

It has been common to consider prayer as consisting of three parts, supposed to be discoverable in the Lord's Prayer. These parts are *adoration*, *supplication*, and *confession*. The examples afforded us in the Bible teach that these parts of prayer are not always to be used, even in individual exercises of devotion; and much less should they all be found in every prayer that is offered. They may have a

place in every meeting, but not in every prayer. Their proper place is in the introductory and concluding prayers, which ought by all means to be in reference to the meeting itself. If they be otherwise, they must anticipate or repeat the matter of other prayers, to the gendering of confusion, and the destruction of interest and profit.

The introductory and concluding prayers admit, if they do not require, direct addresses to God, in the way of adoration and general thanksgiving. They admit of confession of sin, and a deprecation of its awful consequences. The presence and influences of the Spirit may be largely invoked upon all the exercises of the meeting, according as they have been or are to be performed.

To the beginning and close of meetings, these things in their general application most certainly should be confined.

The introductory service having been performed, the other prayers should be direct to the point in hand, whatever that may be. Like the prayers spoken of in the scripture, they should dispense with the parade of introduction, or close, as such; just telling the story to God in the simplest and plainest language, solemn and reverent, but not adulatory or repetitious.

We should not feel as though God our Father was to be propitiated by flatteries and professions, before we can expect a favorable response. Humility, and sincerity, and honesty, and earnestness, are all that he cares to see in us. His mind needs no preparation to render him favorably disposed. The seeming awe with which God is often approached argues distrust rather than faith, and selfishness rather than love. Why should there be more solicitude to propitiate our Father in heaven than our father on earth? The idea that such a direct and simple prayer, for just what we want, and for nothing else, will seem too short, or too naked, is altogether baseless and absurd. What if it be two minutes? What if it be one minute? No matter; provided the end be answered. What if the thing we want lie all uncovered and alone before God and the congregation? That is just as it should lie. That is the way to know where it is and what it is. We need not cover it up, as if we were ashamed of what we had done.

In so far as directness and explicitness are concerned in our manner of approaching God, the prayer of Abraham's servant, when going to seek a wife for Isaac, is an excellent model for our imitation; indeed, such is the character of almost every prayer recorded in the Bi-

ble. If thanksgiving be offered, the cause for it is distinctly stated; if confession be made, some sin is specified; if supplications be uttered, something definite and tangible is sought. You find no flourish of vapid, unmeaning ceremony, and hollow complimentary expression. Just listen: (*Gen.* 24: 12—14.) "Oh Lord God of my master Abraham, I pray thee send me good speed this day, and show kindness unto my master Abraham. Behold I stand here by the well of water; and the daughters of the men of the city come to draw water; and let it come to pass that the damsel to whom I shall say, Let down thy pitcher, I pray thee, that I may drink; and she shall say, Drink, and I will give thy camels drink also; let the same be she that thou hast appointed for thy servant Isaac; and thereby shall I know that thou hast shewed kindness unto my master."

When Daniel, (*Dan.* 2: 17, 18,) had a great concern on his hands, in the matter of Nebuchadnezzar's dream; how simple and direct, was his manner of prayer. "Then Daniel went to his house, and made the thing known to Hananiah, Mishael and Usariah, his companions; that they would desire mercies of the God of heaven, concerning this secret." See the publican come trembling into the tem-

ple, with down cast eyes afar off from the holy place, striking his breast with his hand, and now hear his tremulous voice cry out "God be merciful to me a sinner." One such direct, pointed prayer, is worth an hundred, or a thousand, of those soulless performances, which we sometimes hear and sometimes utter; filled up, with every thing, and really meaning nothing, serving no purpose, but to try the patience of the assembly.

It will tend greatly to the concentration of thought and desire, if the subject of each prayer be announced, before the prayer is offered. And if in a brief address, the subject matter be expounded, it will be all the better. All this, will in its tendency make us feel, that we have an understood object in coming to God; and a corresponding expected result to encourage us. We shall feel, as though we have something to do, and we shall do it with good will; and whatever is so done, is likely to succeed. The economy in time, by such an arrangement, is also immense. No one, who has not seen things done in this way, will have any idea of the number of prayers, and other separate services, which can be brought within a single hour; and all without any hurry or confusion. Just have the motto, "one thing at a time" before your eyes, and you will have

time enough for every thing, that ought to be done.

A great deal has been said about short exercises, and especially short prayers, in social meetings; but hitherto with but little effect. Nor is it likely there will be any essential and permanent reformation, while it is thought allowable to jumble every thing into a single prayer.

While miscellaneous praying is practised, the same things will, many of them, be repeated by every one who leads in devotion; a great many senseless expressions, will be introduced, to supply the lack of thought, and a so called prayer of fifteen minutes, will be spun out of nothing, and end in nothing. You may according to the proverb, as well wait for "the river to run by," as expect a short performance, from the man who has nothing in particular that he feels, and nothing in particular to say. He takes no note of progress, either from the amount of thought uttered, or from the flight of time; if he have any guide, it is found in the exhaustion of his physical strength, or the restlessness of the company. Speak to such an one about brevity, and he will think you are commending him for practising it.

If the proposed change in conducting prayer

meetings, can be thoroughly effected; there will be no sense of tediousness, and no occasion of protracting a meeting, to an unreasonable length.

This definiteness, and singleness of aim, will rise in importance before our minds, if we recur to what has already been said, respecting unity of heart, in all social approaches to God. At the expense, almost of repetition, I must here assert the great truth; that in no other way, can we gain the aids of our social feelings, in moving and shaping our own minds, or in meeting those peculiar promises of God, made to hearts that are agreed in asking. It is mockery, to talk about *agreement* in prayer, where fifty, or a hundred things, however good in themselves, are jumbled together, without any order; being not only unknown to the hearers, but as is often the case, unpremeditated, by the speaker himself. Christ never meant such unpremeditated, multifarious, miscellaneous praying; when he said, 'If two of you shall agree on earth, as touching anything ye shall ask, it shall be done for them, of your Father who is in heaven.'

CHAPTER XIV.

How to secure attendance.

I have another thought of no small consequence, to urge on my readers. We have always heard from every quarter, complaints that prayer-meetings are poorly attended, even by christians, and that they are all but deserted, by the irreligious.

This general backwardness, is an evil of no small magnitude; and one for which an adequate remedy, though long sought, has never yet been found. The case however, is not a hopeless one. Just let every brother, freely speak out what he thinks, and what he feels; let brief direct prayers be offered in singleness of heart, for one object at one time; let there be brevity, and variety, and unity, and earnestness, flowing from deep piety; and then note the result. We are much mistaken, if in this way, meetings for prayer, may not be as interesting as those for preaching; and if the young as well as the old, the irreligious, as well as the religious, will not be found eager, to press into them.

There may be those, who are incredulous,

and who say, that such a state of things cannot in ordinary cases, be brought about. As the objection is one purely practical, and only to be obviated by manifest failure, after full and fair trial; I say put it to the test, rather than talk against it. Make an honest, full, and faithful trial, and then say what can, and what cannot be done. You will have difficulties, but my word for it, you will not after such a trial tell us, that no such thing is possible, as a "*Reformed Prayer-meeting.*" But if you will not make the effort, do not wonder if the influences of the Spirit shall be withheld, and zeal shall decline, and iniquity shall abound, and the ways of Zion shall mourn, because few come to her solemn feasts. One brother cannot effect a general reform in any church, but all the brethren can; and therefore let every brother feel, that upon himself rests the responsibility."

CHAPTER XV.

Specific faults in Prayer.

To render what I have written, more intelligible, and to imprint it more strongly on the

memory, and the feelings; I shall point out some specific faults, which are noticeable in public prayers. I am sensible of the delicacy of the undertaking as tending to hold up individuals in an unfavorable light, possibly to expose them to ridicule. But if I fail in drawing my pictures so that they shall be recognized, then of course no stigma is fastened on any one; and if I succeed, then the fault is in the original and not in the portrait. I have fixed no mark of disrespect on any one, but only revealed it.

I mean no personalities; my object is not to inflict pain or disgrace, but merely to point out faults, in such a way, that they may be seen and avoided. I do not speak now of the length of prayers, nor of confused order, in the arrangement of material, or of the multitude of topics introduced, but of *style* and *manner*.

Perhaps the quintessence of what I have to say, may be summed up in this; that the performer is liable to think more of those who may be present as hearers, than of God to whom his prayer is, or ought to be addressed.

I begin with the HISTORIC PRAYER, which is by no means uncommon.

There is no objection, to some simple allusion, to well known facts; as a means of bringing God, more distinctly and vividly before the mind, and thus of raising it, to a higher tone

of devotion. But we have all heard prayers, which were more like repeating history than addressing God. There was nothing of prayer left but the name. Perhaps there was some sentimental moralizing, on passing or past events; but no confession, thanksgiving, or supplication to God as the dispenser of good. These recitations, may have been a summary of church history, general or particular; a piece of auto-biography; or the history of our country, or an account of a hundred other things, which in such a form have no place in prayer, certainly not in the social prayer. They were uttered to men, not God.

The Didactic or Doctrinal prayer; is another common and erroneous form. Some portion of theological truth before the mind, helps the soul to conceive of its own relations to its Creator and Redeemer. But this is a very different thing, from dealing out a whole system of divinity, for the instruction and edification of the hearers.

Instead of a prayer we now have a lecture, so out of place, that it neither pleases or edifies us. The time is worse than wasted.

SUGGESTIVE and ARGUMENTATIVE prayers are not uncommon. These two qualities though not the same are often in different degrees, mingled together. One will suggest thoughts

and considerations to God, as though they must be new to him, and as if they must act with him as a motive for granting favors; while another pleads and argues, as if he would force conviction on the mind of God, that he ought to do the thing sought.

Such prayer, must be displeasing as wanting in humility, reverence and earnestness of desire. Such persons press *obligation* on God, rather than implore his grace. He needs no such means of convincing or moving him. He had rather see the broken and contrite heart, pouring out its strong desires.

Some offer, what may be called a *Meditative Prayer*. In a prayer of this sort, topics of thought and reflection, are brought forward; such as perhaps, in some indirect way, relate to God; but which proceed from no particular desire, and aim at no result.

We are treated with familiar meditations on the character and attributes of Jehovah; on his works of creation, and providence and grace; on the beauties of nature in their varied changes and departments; on the creation and fall of man; on his recovery by the gospel. Such a performance, may claim to be made up of pious reflections upon all sorts of things; but it is not in reality a prayer to God. It may begin any where, and be prolonged with-

out end. If the hearers are amused, they are not profited.

I speak next of the **PREACHING PRAYER**. It is all, or nearly all, made up of argument and exhortation, on points of doctrine or duty, really meant for the hearers, though in form addressed to God; and accompanied it may be with a continued invocation of the divine name. Sometimes, God is told how dreadfully wicked men are, and how prone to harden their hearts, and how dreadful it will be for them to perish from under the gospel, and how free salvation is, and how easy it is for them to come to Christ; and much more of this sort. Then you have requests made, that they may look at this, that, and the other consideration, and repent, and believe in Christ, and all in a way which no one would think of employing, if praying only to God himself. Now there is to say the least, a degree of impiety in thus preaching to sinners, and calling it praying.

I have now to speak of what may be called *eloquent or poetic prayers*. The same objection, lies against both these faults in prayer, viz: they aim at effect, by means of ornament and beauty of language. They are calculated, rather to be admired and applauded by shallow thinkers, than to have power with God. Poetic flowers and figures, and nicety of diction,

are not the natural language of the heart, certainly not of most hearts; yea, we think they are not the natural language of any heart, when deeply solemn and awe struck, with a sense of a present Jehovah. It is plain, that a prayer offered in a public assembly, fails of its end; if the language used, be such, that it cannot readily become a channel of thought, and feeling, for those of whom that assembly is composed.

The last specimen of faulty prayer, which I shall introduce, is that of **EXPERIMENTAL PRAYER**. Christian experience, may be considered entire, or in its parts, but in prayer, the detail of particulars should be avoided, except as there may be special reason, to insist on the bestowment, of some one christian grace, as humility or zeal, or penitence for sin. I would not be understood as objecting to any thing, which is expressive of the natural desires of the soul; but only to that kind of particularity, which must proceed from the head, rather than the heart.

It is the same with christian experience, as with the health of the body. The common and natural method of praying for a sick man, is that his health may be restored, without particular reference to the nature, or location of his disease. But if a limb is to be ampu-

tated, or tumour extracted, or if the brain is diseased, the prayer will naturally become more particular, and the malady, will be distinctly pointed out.

As now, every man would be ashamed, in praying for the restoration, or continuance of health, to specify his hands and feet, and his sight, and hearing, and smelling, and tasting, his digestive organs, his skin and bones, and blood, and every thing; so let every one in praying for the completion of christian character, avoid naming pride, and sensuousness, and avarice, and indolence, and passion, and all the minutia, of which a complete christian character is made up. In as far as these things are the results of divine grace, and as the need of them is felt, it is most certainly proper to pray for them, and we here find the reason, for rejecting an enumeration of the whole catalogue.

Are any now ready to ask, "What have we left of manner, or language, out of which to form the exterior of our prayers, after such large deductions from those forms of devotion, which we have always been accustomed to hear and to utter"?

We answer, every thing, by which the heart lifts up its voice. We have left to us, the entire language of intellect, and feeling; all the material for appropriate approach to God.

We have nothing to hinder us, from drawing near to him, in simplicity and godly sincerity, for every legitimate and proper end. All these things, which we may dread to lose, have never added anything to our prayers; they have been but so many excrescencies, and deformities. Let us prune them away, and we shall have altogether more of what God regards as prayer, when we come together into one place. Again we say, do not decide that no improvement is possible, till you have fairly made a trial of what is proposed.

CHAPTER XVI.

A Prayer-meeting described.

I am aware, that I may be thought repetitious, but I am not only anxious to be understood, clearly and distinctly; I wish also to present the same thoughts, from different points of observation, that their use and force, may thus be more fully realized. And although averse to *pattern meetings* altogether, so that I would give no description, to be servilely copied out; yet I think it not amiss to illustrate by a single example, my ideas of what a prayer-meeting should be.

Whether the minister be expected or not, there should be no waiting. A dead silence, for some minutes, is chilling in its influence; and miscellaneous, trifling conversation is still worse. In either case, the brethren and sisters, are liable before the meeting begins, to forget that they have come together to pray to God.

It will be found a matter of no small consequence; that those who first come should take the forward seats, without reference to age or rank; and that others as they come in, should sit next them. Thus will the meeting be compact, whether more or fewer be present; and those coming in later, will neither have to create disturbance by passing others, or be kept at an inconvenient distance. Such is the influence of proximity, on our feelings, that it is scarcely possible to have a spirited and moving meeting, while those present are scattered, one or two in a place, over a large room. Let no one then say, we are trifling; while we insist on such compactness, that hearts shall not be frozen by distance. Nothing which helps to give interest and influence to a prayer-meeting, is a trifle. Getting into the same room, is not necessarily, "coming together in one place," as the scripture hath said.

Without waiting for a minister, or deacon, or elder, or moderator; some one may strike a

verse of a familiar hymn, or make a few brief remarks, or propose prayer. This can be done, while the number is small. This freedom, need not be superceded by the coming in of the pastor, or any officer of the church; though very likely it may be somewhat modified, by such a circumstance. Some brother having a hymn that harmonizes with the state of his mind, now proposes that it be sung. Another suggests a passage of scripture, which he deems appropriate, whether he be, or be not, the leader of the meeting-

Prayer, and exhortation, and singing, and reading short passages from the bible or other books, may with advantage be sometimes spontaneous; and at other times by the leader or at his request.

Requests for prayers, whether, oral or written; local, personal, or general; may with very considerable latitude, be safely admitted. A brother may say, "I have met with unexpected and heavy reverses, and I beg your prayers, that I may be enabled to bear them as a christian, and that I may pass through my trials, without dishonoring religion.

Another says, "my wife, or my child is sick, and we should prize a remembrance in the prayers, of the evening. Another says, "my neighbor is deeply afflicted, and he has not the

consolation of religion; will you join me in praying that his heart may be turned to God for support?"

Another still says, "We have good news from our son abroad, and trust he, has found the Saviour, will you unite with us in praising God?" Another, "My wife and myself, desire your prayers, in behalf of our children, some of them are in an anxious state of mind; we feel their condition to be critical, and desire to be guided aright in dealing with them, and that God would renew their hearts." A brother now rises, and says, "Let us have one prayer; entirely for our minister. He is a man, and feels human frailties. His labors are arduous, his responsibilities are vast, and he is often ready to faint. We cannot expect him to profit us, unless we pray for him. He greatly values the prayers of his people. We will not make our prayers, the medium of expressing sour and censorious feelings, nor yet of fulsome adulation. We do not wish, to be lugging him into every prayer, as a dead formality, but we shall be wanting in our duty to him, and to ourselves, and to God; if we do not appropriate one short, but earnest prayer, for his especial benefit." Another says, "Let us pray for our country," another, "for the world."

Thus as the time and occasion permit, the hour is all occupied, with brief and pertinent exercises. In the carrying on of such a meeting, there can be great freedom, and great variety of exercises, without any breach of order or decorum-

I would respect the well mean endeavors of good men, however injudicious they may be; but for the cause of truth I cannot refrain from requesting my readers, to compare such a meeting as now described, with one, where twenty or thirty persons, are scattered over every part of a room, that will hold three hundred; where the people wait fifteen minutes for a minister, or elder, or deacon; where every meeting begins and ends in the same way; being made up of a long chapter, three long hymns, three prayers of fifteen minutes each; two or three exhortations, repeated for the hundredth time. Which will you prefer? Which will God most delight in? Am I then unreasonable, in using an effort at *reform*, in our *Prayer-meetings*?

CHAPTER XVII.

Monthly Concert of Prayer for the Conversion of the World.

The following remarks on the Monthly Concert have mostly appeared in another form. They are inserted as an appropriate part of this MANUAL, for which they were originally designed:—

On the first Monday evening of the first month in the year, I had calculated on meeting my brethren, to pray for the coming of Christ's kingdom in the world; but circumstances detaining me at home, I felt constrained, in place of attending a public meeting, to write out some of my long-cherished thoughts respecting Concerts of Prayer in general, and especially respecting what is now familiarly called the "Monthly Concert of Prayer for Missions."

The Monthly Concert in its origin, was adopted for a specific purpose. When the first Baptist missionaries went to India, they said to their brethren who staid at home, "We are going down into the cave, and do you take care and hold on upon the rope" In carrying out this significant emblem, they mutually agreed

to observe a concert of prayer for success in this then novel undertaking. The idea was, that at or near the same time they should think of each other, though a hemisphere apart, as praying to the same great and glorious Being, and for an object alike dear to all their hearts.

This idea was so pleasing, and so rational, so calculated to stir up prayer and excite to hearty effort, that when other missionaries were sent forth, the same agreement was entered into between them and their patrons. The missionaries were thus assured, that on the arrival of the first Monday in each month, they should have special and personal remembrance in the prayers of their brethren and sisters at home; while they in turn would reciprocate the act and send up their own prayers in concert; in order that all might mingle together as a cloud of incense before the eternal throne.

But since this concert was thus agreed upon, great changes have come over the face of the world, and the work of missions now is a far different thing from what it was forty years ago. There can no longer be that reciprocity of personal feeling and interest between the missionaries and the churches, which at first was the great moving spring to action in these agreements. Whatever may be true in regard to single churches and small sections of coun-

try, from which some of their own number may have gone forth as missionaries, it is manifest that as respects the churches at large, the very names of foreign missionaries are, quite unknown to them. The majority of the present generation have grown into active life, since some of the missionaries have been in the field ; and the younger missionaries cannot be personally known to one in ten thousand of those who are expected to contribute to their support and to pray for their success. To the hundreds who have gone from our own shores must be added a multitude of others, who are converts from Paganism, or from a Christianity so corrupted as to be little better. The localities also stretch around the globe. We shall therefore greatly misjudge in reference to the moving springs of the human mind ; if we make much account of personal sympathies, in giving interest and effect to the monthly concert.

The same facts also establish the futility of a practice, which, in the early days of missions, had great power. I refer to the extended communication at each concert, of intelligence from missionaries and stations. This was then like the reception of letters by the family circle, from children and brothers and sisters abroad. At times such intelligence has been

electrifying. It made us acquainted with the condition of dear brethren and friends, whose feelings and interest were identified with our own. But now that the missionary field has become so extended, the day has gone by for taking advantage of any such general statements as can be made respecting it, during the brief hour allotted to a single meeting. We cannot keep ourselves minutely informed respecting our missionaries and their work, even by reading; and how can we expect to do it, by any statements for which a few minutes only can be spared? The truth is, in this day, missionary intelligence is just as good as any other intelligence respecting the progress of the Gospel, and no better. A personal or local fact may be thrilling in its character and powerful in its results, but not because it is an item of *missionary* intelligence; it must be so because of its own intrinsic qualities. It makes no difference to us in our feelings, whether such thrilling incident comes to our notice, dated Ceylon, Chicago, or California.

Another reason for remodeling our prescriptive views of the monthly concert, is found in the fact that foreign missions can now hardly be said to hold even a *prominence* among the various objects of Christian enterprize. We do not mean that the "moral dignity of the

missionary enterprise," in this respect, has in any degree retrograded, but only that a host of other moral movements have sprung up around it, some of them doubtless its own offspring. For example, no rational man can look on the map of these United States, extending now literally from ocean to ocean, and offering to our seamen a "coasting voyage" longer than any other *sea voyage* they can ever make, and say that foreign missions, are not equalled in rank and consequence by what are technically called home missions. I need not go into further specifications of what is familiar to every mind. I only wish to show that in the multiplication of enterprises, kindred in design to foreign missions, we find an overpowering argument for remodeling the original design of the monthly concert.

As a first thing, the concert must have a wider range. If we do not give a wide and general scope to its topics, we must do one of two other things, either of which is too preposterous to find an advocate. We must either give to foreign missions the exclusive benefits of concerted prayer; not even attempting in this way to pray for any of those things equally demanding our prayers; or we must have a separate season of concert for every object claiming our attention. We have then left us

the only other alternative, a concert for the evangelization of the world.

This term, "the conversion of the world," has indeed, by common consent, become familiar to our ears, in connection with the monthly concert; but the concert itself remains without any correspondent change. With the change in the grounds on which the Monthly Concert of Prayer rested, we are reduced to the necessity of abandoning it altogether, or shaping it to the exigencies of the times in which we live. That we are bound to pray for the universal subjugation of the world to the spiritual reign of Christ, we know." Thy kingdom come; thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven," is a petition which we are to use, in the spirit of it, not monthly, but daily, and this manifestly is to be done in the way of concerted, social prayer. And that is the best method of carrying out this design of Christ, which in the aggregate, calls forth the greatest amount of earnest, humble, believing, self-denying and self-devoting prayers. If this great object may be promoted by the setting apart a monthly season to pray for it in unison, whether as a whole or in its details; then such a season is useful; but if such a season shall come to be regarded as a substitute for all prayer, to the same end, then it is an evil. We gain nothing unless the

spirit of prayer is increased. Whether the Monthly Concert of Prayer, as now generally observed, is on the whole serviceable to the cause of Christ in the world, is, to say the least, questionable ; that it may be made useful there is no doubt.

In favor of the concert it should be remarked, that the first Monday of each month, having already grown into a sort of consecrated season of prayer for the heathen, that they may be converted to God, is a thing of some weight. We do not tear down a building erected for a valuable purpose, because, for some reason, that identical purpose cannot be longer well pursued ; but we set about converting the building to some other end equally useful. So in this case, the fact that a day has been reserved from other days, for purposes connected with the conversion of the world, is not a thing lightly to be thrown away, because through change of circumstances, we cannot use it exactly according to its first designation.

Again, the coming of Christ's kingdom in the world, is a work so great, so multitudinous in its different departments, so truly both the work of God and the work of man, that it demands much time, much thought, much feeling, much labor, much treasure ; and all these things demand much prayer. The whole and

every part, as occasion and opportunity may be offered, should fill the soul and lift it up to God. We should expect great things, attempt great things, and pray for great things. These are the things which, in the eyes of God, give importance to this world. Take them away, and he could have no more pleasure in the works of his own hands. And while we cannot, on the one hand, plead any Divine command for this monthly observance, we cannot, on the other, find any impiety in it; and we seem instinctively, to feel a persuasion that to such an object, so great and so good, we ought to give the beginnings of our months.

We are so apt to shrivel up and sink down to ourselves, like the snail into his shell, that it is good to have a statedly recurring season, into which we may stretch upward and look abroad, and think of something else beside those puny objects, made up of our conveniences and little personal delights and wishes, which are so apt to become the boundaries of our actions, and consequently of our prayers. And may not God himself, have had something of this kind in view, when he said by Isaiah 66: 23, "And it shall come to pass, that from one new moon to another, and from one Sabbath to another, shall all flesh come to worship before me, saith the Lord? Who can

point out any specific difference between these new-moon gatherings of all flesh to worship, before the Lord, and our monthly concerts, except that the one is the seed hardly beginning to germinate, and the other is the same seed grown into the majestic tree, with its monthly seasons of fruit-bearing, and spreading forth its leaves for the healing of the nations?

It does seem that if we could only get into the spirit of the thing, these monthly convocations, instead of making us feel that we had done up all our praying for the conversion of the world in the beginning of the month, would only make us feel, that we had but begun, and that through the whole month, our hearts would be larger and warmer, and throb with stronger pulsations.

But let it be remembered here, that God seems not to recognize any difference between mission labors and other labors. "The field is the world;" the commanded prayer is, "Thy kingdom come;" and the God-honored result is, "All flesh" shall come to worship before the Lord.

While in the observance of the monthly concert, the great theme of the world's conversion, as a mighty unit, should not be lost sight of; the number of topics bearing upon it are almost infinitely diversified. Not only do

they include every thing connected with what are called, Foreign Missions, such as the missionaries in the field, the supply of more laborers, native churches, schools, printing-presses, translations, the preparation of heathen and deluded minds to receive the world of life ; together with the revival of the mission spirit and liberality in giving among the churches at home ; but we have connected with the Monthly Concert, all that belongs to what are called Home Missions.

Home Missions, in their full sense, embrace not only preachers and preaching, but the distribution of Bibles and Tracts, and other religious books, Colporteurs, Sabbath mission schools, seminaries of learning, and other kindred institutions, and all the destitute portions of our own land ; but as more important than everything else, the religious state of the churches. On the spirituality, purity, activity and liberality of the churches, everything under God depends, as to the future prospects of this world.

As a portion of Home Missionary labor, we have in the same connection the reclaiming by gospel culture, those spots larger or smaller now given up to wickedness. Especially must our cities, be reclaimed from that worst species of heathenism, in which we see more than

half their population involved. And then again, there is the cause of education, in all its branches, the abolition of war and slavery, and despotism, and superstition ; together with the abrogation of struggling sects and parties, in the one church of God. Human governments the best of them, must be made over again ; and legislation regenerated. In short we have but begun to tell the things, which have to be gained by prayer and labor, before this world can be converted to Christ.

Now while we should still hold fast our attachment to the wholesome proverb, "one thing at a time," we ought to know, that all these things are in their turn, to be made the subjects of brief remark and special prayer. How then can there be any want of employment for the concert hour? And how can the right observance of this hour, fail of furnishing matter of prayer for every day, till the month shall again come round? It was in view of scenes like these, that the Psalmist uttered that most wonderful prayer, with which I close this article, as you find it in the 72d Psalm. "Let the whole earth be filled with his glory, Amen, and Amen. The Prayers of David the son of Jesse can grasp no more," are ended, or have their limit.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Frequency of Prayer-meetings.

The benefits of Prayer-meetings are vitally affected by a consideration not yet attended to.

It is a matter of some delicacy and some difficulty, to decide, how often it is advisable for the members of a church to meet for social prayer. Some in their zeal may say, it is impossible to meet too often; for as prayer is the most important business of life, there is no danger of praying to much. This is indeed, in a qualified sense true, and yet in such a way, as in no manner to decide the question proposed.

It is not to determine, how much prayer is desirable, but how many meetings for the purpose. It is a point not difficult of proof, that the frequency of meetings, may diminish the amount of prayer.

We are interested to know, how frequently at what times, and for what length of time, Christians generally can leave their regular business and their family arrangements, and assemble for social prayer.

If prayermeetings and seasons of brotherly conference be holden too seldom, the members will lose the spirit, and remembrance of them, and their habits will become so entirely worldly, that they will either neglect attendance, or come without preparation, for profiting others, or being profited by them. This, however, will depend very much on pains taken to keep up attention to the subject, on the part of the pastor and others.

But if too frequent, these meetings become inconvenient to many, interfering with their necessary concerns, or leaving them no time for any other social intercourse; so that they will be neglected by many, and attended by others with reluctance, as a matter of duty.

These extremes should be avoided, so that the remembrance of one meeting, may be retained till another arrives; and yet, that the recurrence should not only be welcome but waited for. Something less than half the members of a church, it is believed, ordinarily attend the occasional meetings of the week, and those who do attend, are generally the same individuals. It is worthy of enquiry now, whether in some cases, one meeting in a week, instead of more, would not secure a better attendance; and whether the gain to those who now absent themselves, would not be greater than the loss,

if any loss there would be ; to those who are now constant in their places. This point has been introduced, not with a view of finding some uniform rule ; but rather for the purpose of inducing inquiry, on the subject, and efforts every where, to give to prayer-meetings, their largest and best influences ; as well by regulating their frequency, as their management. It is sometimes an excellent plan, to have a weekly lecture, introduced by a short prayer-meeting. As to the length of time a prayer-meeting should continue, a word is enough. In all ordinary cases, if such a meeting has not answered its end, by continuing an hour, it is in vain to prolong it. If it has produced its end, then it is time to stop.

It is worthy of remembrance also, that in some instances, if stated public weekly meetings were less frequent, there might be more, private neighborhood and family prayer-meetings, some of the best meetings in the world. Probably these interviews, have a greater influence, in causing brotherly love and spiritual acquaintanceship, to abound, than any other means, that have been employed. They seem to render religion an every day, home concern. We are greatly mistaken, if the seeds of revival, are not often sown and nourished here unseen by the world, till they make their ap-

pearance on some more public arena. For in regard to revivals, it is to be noticed, that many who figure in them largely after their developments were not found among those who mourned and wept, and labored and prayed in Zion's days of darkness.

It will be well for us also with unprejudiced minds, to look at another fact, viz: That meetings are likely to be much neglected, in a time of religious declension, and too much multiplied, when the public mind becomes awakened to spiritual things. By looking at such a fact before hand, we may learn to exercise proper caution in the avoidance of these extremes.

Feeling will and must have much to do in these matters, but Judgment should always hold the reins.

CHAPTER XIX.

Female Prayer-meetings.

I am strongly tempted to give the caption, and leave the chapter itself a blank.

For really what can be said about Female Prayer-meetings, but just this, that they are good and profitable? If we reason about them, they stand approved, just as other prayer-meetings do, and if we appeal to experience, that also testifies in their favor. Argument and reason appear to be all on one side, and to urge their culture. Nothing appears against them but the too common consent of Christian females to neglect them.

We hope that those pious women who may read the foregoing treatise, will be led to enquire, whether they may not render some service to the cause of Christ, by doing more in the way of meetings among themselves, than they have done.

It may be, dear sisters, that you have not met at all for prayer, or if this be not so, it may be you can make your meetings more attractive

more instructive and edifying. You should remember that your sex comprises a very large majority of the members of Christ's church that you are free from many of those cares and perplexities, which often hinder men from attendance on weekly meetings; and besides, that when by yourselves, you can properly converse and pray, on topics of vital interest to religion, which cannot well come into a meeting of both sexes.

We only ask you to seek guidance from above, to give the subject all proper attention, and whatever you think you can do, for the cause of Christ, to do it without delay.

CHAPTER XX.

Things which destroy Prayer-meetings.

No one part of religious duty, will ever be done alone, or neglected alone. Perfect symmetry, in the Christian character and life, we must not look for, in this imperfect state; and yet, though its parts may be sadly out of proportion, and mal-formed, character will always be a whole.

Every thing in religious duty may be regarded, both as a means and an end. Action and re-action are always to be found there. The same fire that warms and vivifies, the closet and the family worship, will also warm the social gatherings. The keeping of the heart by each one, is guarding the sanctuary; and so too neglect in one part, causes loss and decay in every other.

These things, Christian friends, you can but know, and yet it may not be amiss, "to stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance."

Terms relative to the heart are general in their significations, and while they may be

known and believed, and even felt in the aggregate; they may be strangely overlooked and neglected in their parts. A man for example, may be very careful for a season at least, in keeping his heart religiously as he thinks; viz., he may be exact in secret prayer and punctual in reading his bible and attending meetings and going over all the forms of religious duty, and perhaps may take great pains to be prepared for these things, while some unthought of sin is holding his soul in bondage. He may be harboring feelings of revenge for an injury, or planning a hard bargain, or striving through envy to supplant a rival, or giving currency to slander, or laying the reins too closely on his appetites, or shunning some known, but painful duty, or doing a hundred other things which the Christian should not do.

The psalmist has set such evils, in their true light as regards prayer. "If, says he, I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me." How easy then for a man to disqualify himself for secret converse with God, and so to become a useless member of the prayer-meeting and the church!

Any thing which keeps the members of a church from coming together, with confidence and affection unbroken, goes to break up

the power of social prayer. There is in that case no such thing as being of one accord in one place, and of fervent charity among themselves. Unkindness and ill temper in the family, a refusal or neglect of a needful favor to a neighbor, especially in time of affliction, unexplained and unsettled differences about business, undue officiousness in the private concerns of others, unfriendly remarks, disaffection with the minister, and how many other things we cannot tell, may keep brethren from meeting together, or if they meet, may keep them from gaining any advantage thereby. And to all these things, the unclassified and undefined influences of what we call *worldliness* in its various bearings, and tell us, whether there is no danger that our prayer-meetings may without our knowledge, become nugatory. How forcibly are we taught, not only that we must pray, but must *watch* and pray?

One reason, we apprehend, why these dangers are not more readily perceived and promptly met, may be found, in the general, confused, and pointless manner in which the exercises of our prayer-meetings are often conducted. If we were accustomed to see every prayer, and exhortation, having an intelligible, well defined, and single aim, the whole life and soul of devotion could never depart without ob-

servation. An alarm would be given, and the latent cause of the mischief would be searched out.

CHAPTER XXI.

Concluding Remarks.

After reading my little book, some will most likely, in not very good humor, say, "We can never submit to such sudden and revolutionary changes as are here contended for. If we attempt any thing of this sort, we shall just break up, and destroy our prayer-meetings on the old and tried plan, and have nothing left in their place. We must have our own way of praying, or we cannot pray at all. "We do not know what right any one has, to teach us what we shall pray for, or how we shall pray, and other things of the like sort."

Others again may say, they find nothing new. That they do not see, wherein a prayer-meeting conducted as we propose, will differ from other prayer-meetings. "We do not expect that meetings will be all made just alike, rather than other things, but we see nothing peculiar."

To the first class of objectors we only say, "Keep to your old ways, till you are convinced there may be better ones. The author would be the last man to dictate to you, or control you in any way, but by convincing your judgement.

If you are praying men at all, you must believe the subject worthy a very careful and candid consideration. This then, I hope and trust you will not refuse, and to this I am willing to leave you. It is not to be expected, that an entire and universal, and immediate change will take place. This is no reason however, why you should not read, and consider, and judge; and whenever you may think your prayer-meetings, susceptible of any improvement, let that improvement be instantly made. Make a beginning, even if it be a small one; and others will naturally follow in the train.

To those who love Zion, and prayer, and prayer-meetings, for her prosperity; and yet find nothing new in the present treatise, if there are any such, we tender our sincere congratulations, and hope they will be zealous, and efficient co-laborers in endeavors to bring about a better way of doing these things.

We have not designed our little book, as a book of rhapsodies, but of truth; not so much a recommendation, of prayer-meetings, as a

means for making them, recommend themselves.

If any great advances shall be made during the life-time of the author, they must be speedy; but he fully believes such advances will be made, and that a glory now unknown, shall hang over the prayer-meeting hall, and that heaven and earth shall hold more familiar and endearing converse.

It is his desire before closing his earthly labors, to do something, that may help forward the desired change. Though he has gained no earthly reward for his labors, he trusts they have not been in vain in the Lord; and gladly would he leave a legacy for those who may survive him, which shall have a value, long after gold and silver, and gems, shall be worthless. Of one thing he is perfectly sure, that to whatever degree he may lend an influence in the reformation of *prayer-meetings*, he will to the same extent lend an influence for the salvation of the world.

TOPICS OF PRAYER.

Some topics for prayer and remarks are here added, as a guide to those who may desire such aid.

no harm to any if they are not used, and the number we apprehend is small, who will not find them occasionally convenient. If made familiar to the mind of any brother, by a little sturdy, such a list of topics, may prove a remedy for that vacuity which all feel more or less when speaking in a public meeting. No man has perfect and constant command of his own thoughts, and few, if any, are strangers to the feeling of dread, lest an effort to speak or pray, prove an entire failure. This may be one reason of those long, prosy, common-place introductions to a prayer, which are often so tedious. It is something to have at hand a remedy for so great an evil.

It is not principally, however, as a remedy for a barren state of mind, that we introduce this catalogue of topics. We think when the mind is active and fertile and the heart warm, such aid will be more especially useful.

One may be called to lead a meeting, hurried in from the noise, and bustle and confusion of the world, when he hardly dare trust his own thoughts, or the same thing may occur from the power of disease in deranging the nervous system. In such a case, the very idea of having something to fall back upon, will give a man vigor of his own, and help him to draw from his own resources. At any rate we think it best to give the arrangements not claiming for it any thing like completeness.

TOPICS SUITABLE FOR AN ORDINARY GENERAL PRAYER-MEETING.

ADORATION OF GOD. His greatness ; majesty ; justice ; goodness ; works ; forbearance ; bounties ; mercy, and grace.

INVOCATION OF THE SPIRIT. That his presence may be felt ; that he would inspire awe ; unfold scripture truth ; warm the heart ; subdue the soul ; give ready utterance.

CONFESSIONS OF SIN. Rejection of God ; breach of a good law ; contempt of Christ ; injury to our fellow men ; deserving wrath.

THANKSGIVINGS. God's goodness in creation ; redemption bounties of Providence ; health ; peace ; blessing of education ; national blessings ; spread of the Gospel ; revivals, &c.

PRAYER FOR THE CHURCH, Spirituality of its members ; purity of life ; activity ; liberality ; brotherly love ; kindness, &c.

CHRISTIAN FAMILIES. Instruction ; government ; dutifulness of children ; parental love ; conjugal harmony ; family worship ; observance of sabbath ; attendance on religious worship, &c.

IRRELIGIOUS FAMILIES. That they may give themselves to reading and reflection ; may attend religious meetings.

OLD PEOPLE. that they may retain health ; activity ; eyesight and hearing ; reason and memory ; may be cared for and comforted ; may have patience ; cheerfulness ; that they may be getting ripe for heaven.

MAN IN MIDDLE LIFE. As parents ; men in business ; men

men in influence; use of their property; church members; civil officers.

THE YOUNG. That they may be considerate; studious; sober; industrious; peaceable; honest; prudent; dutiful; pious.

THE MINISTRY. With kindness; with respect; with approvals; for strength; courage; wisdom; affections; communion with God; sympathy and aid from the people.

DISABLED AND UNSETTLED MINISTERS. Comforts; opportunities for doing good; that they may not be forgotten; may be resigned; large heavenly blessings.

SABBATH SCHOOLS AND OTHER SCHOOLS. Teachers; pupils; progress; piety.

OUR NATION.

OUR RULERS.

PROFESSIONAL MEN.

THE SEASONS.

THE POOR. That they may be willing to help themselves; may be assisted and taught to do so; may have needed comfort; may be kept from envy and complaining; may be laying up treasure in heaven;

THE RICH. That they may be humble; generous; kind and affable; grateful; prayerful and exemplary; holy and happy.

THE HEATHEN. At home and abroad.

THE SICK,

THE BEREAVED,

THE UNFORTUNATE.

} Generally, or individually.

A REVIVAL OF RELIGION. This though embraced in the other topics, may sometimes be made a distinct subject of prayers, as such.

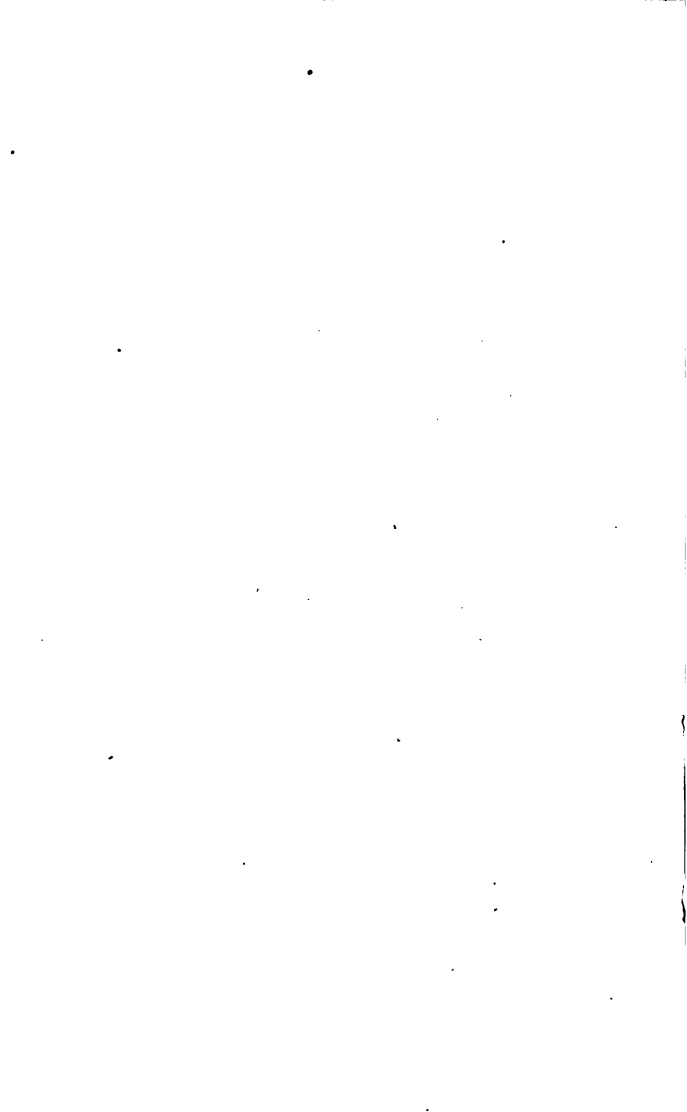
Seasons of Prayer for particular objects.

When a day or part of a day, or a single meeting may be designated for a particular cause, as the prevalence of sickness, drought, a destructive fire, or flood, the low state of religion, or any thing else in particular; the prayers and remarks, should be restricted mostly to topics directly related to the main design of the observance. These in such a case may be dwelt or very fully, and some repetition is perfectly admissible.

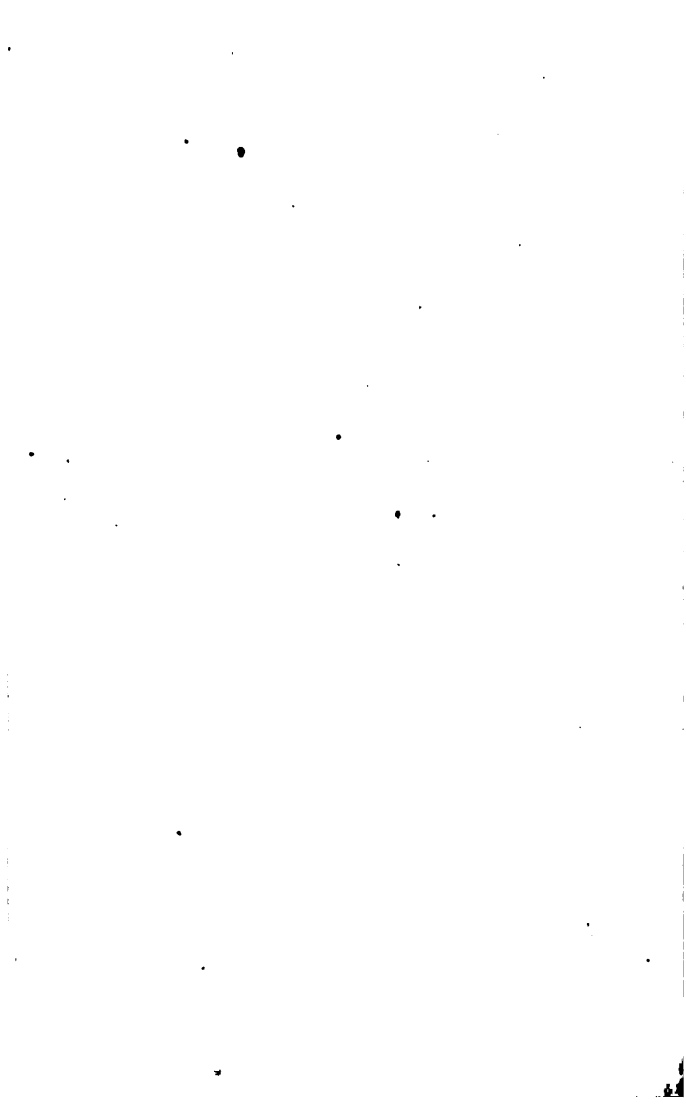
This schedule might be easily enlarged, but this must be sufficient for practical purposes. It is sufficient to shew that the material for a prayer-meeting is always abundant and available.

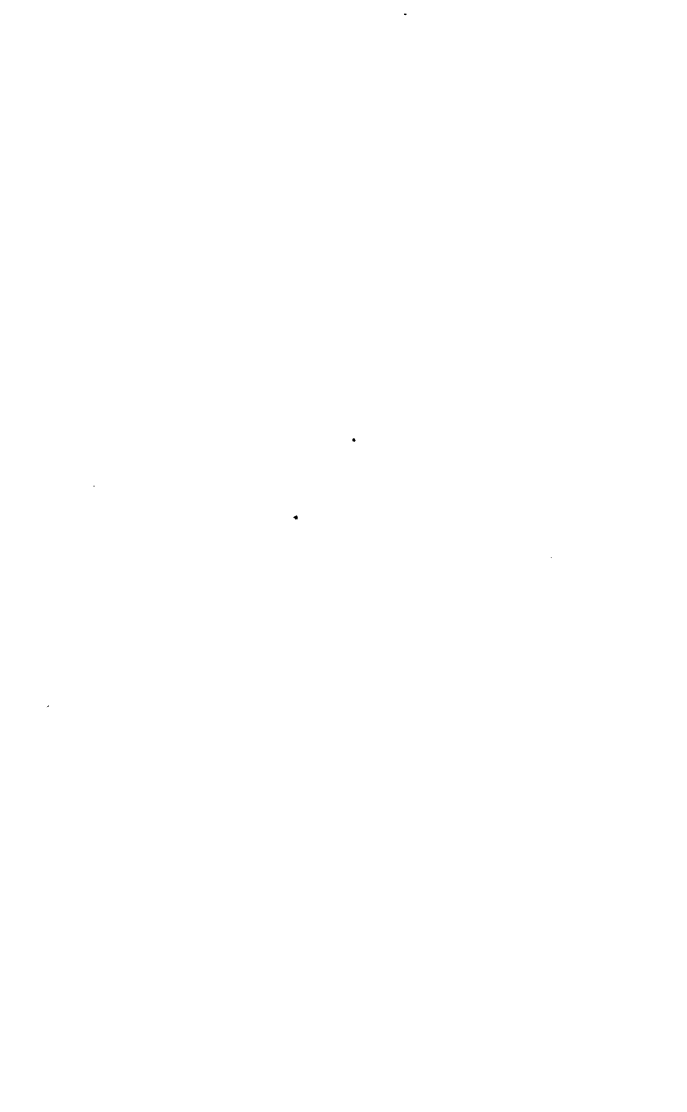
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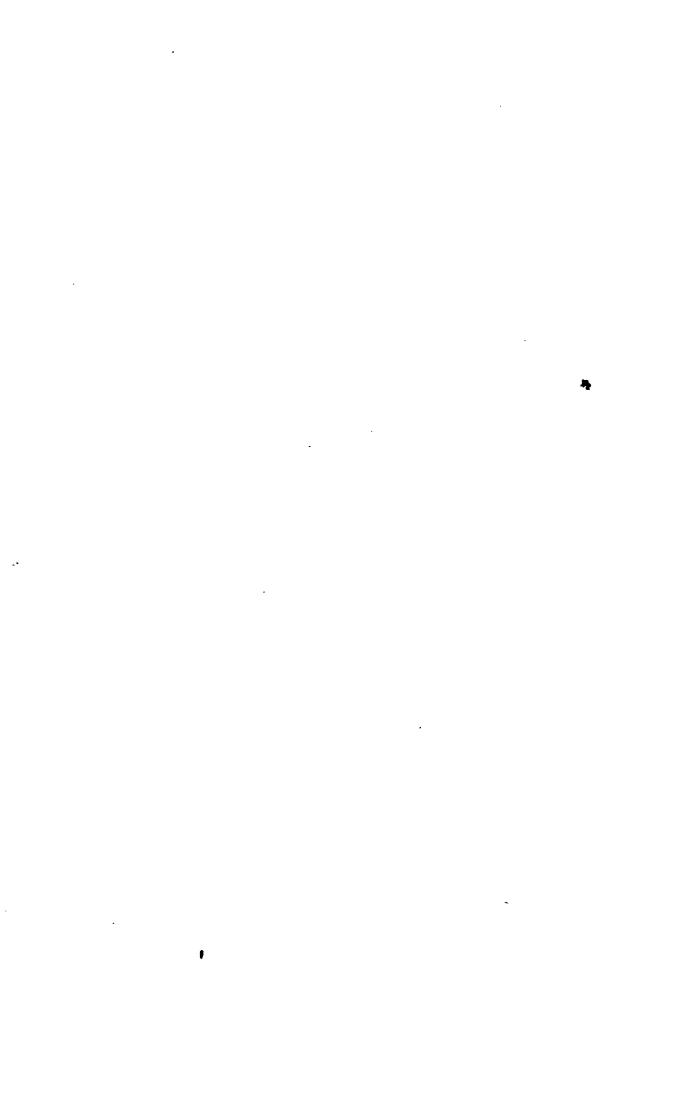
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